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SUBJECT: GEORGIA: CHANGES AT THE BORDER POLICE

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¶1. (SBU) Summary and Comment: General Zaza Gogava, former Chief of the Joint Staff of the Armed Forces at the Ministry of Defense, was appointed Chairman of the Georgian Border Police on November 4, following the resignation of Badri Bitsadze. This new position is widely seen as a demotion for Gogava for failures of the army during the conflict, although some government critics believed that Gogava should not have received any government position at all. Rumors of a merger between the Border Police and Patrol Police swirled after the announcement, but in a meeting between Gogava and EmbOffs on November 7, it was clear that while no final decisions about reorganizing the Border Police have been made, a major upheaval was unlikely. End Summary and Comment.

CHANGES IN THE LEADERSHIP

¶2. (U) On Wednesday, October 29, Badri Bitsadze resigned his position as Chairman of the Border Police, saying that he was a victim of a government campaign to discredit the Border Police. He linked this campaign to the fact that he is the husband of former parliamentary chairperson and head of the opposition party Democrat-Movement United Georgia, Nino Burjanadze. Bitsadze's deputy, Eka Gigauri, resigned as well. Saakashvili appointed General Gogava as Chairman of the Border Police on November 4, after replacing him as Chief of the Joint Staff with Vice-Colonel Vladimer Chachibaia, a graduate of U.S. training programs and a close contact of the Embassy. Despite thanking Gogava for his work with the army, Saakashvili blamed Gogava for his role in the failures of the army during the conflict, according to press reporting.

RESTRUCTURING BEING CONSIDERED

¶3. (SBU) After the announcement of the change in leadership at the Border Police, rumors swirled about a possible merger between the Border Police and the Patrol Police. In a November 5 meeting with EmbOffs, the Head of the Ministry of the Interior Office of Analysis Shota Utiashvili, said that the Patrol Police would staff ports of entry in place of the Border Police in order to address problems of access to different databases, public image and corruption. None of the current Border Police staff would be fired, but would simply change uniforms. In a November 7 meeting between Gogava and EmbOffs, Gogava indicated that there would not be a merger between the Border Police and the Patrol Police, but that changes in staffing at ports of entry were still under discussion. EmbOffs were left with the impression that Patrol Police would take over this function. It was made clear by Gogava, however, that the Border Police would retain control of the "Green Border" - the border space in between authorized ports of entry. In fact, Gogava stated that his focus during his tenure will be on improving conditions at the Green Border. He also stated that the merger of the Coast Guard and the Navy is in the final stages of approval. It will remain under the Border Police control as a civilian

organization.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

14. (U) Gogava was born on July 14, 1971. He graduated from the Tbilisi State Technical University in 1994, and in 1995 began serving in Georgia's State Security Service special task unit "Omega," specializing in counter-terrorism, and continued to work in counter-terrorist units in various offices of the Georgian security services for the next several years. Gogava also received counter-terrorism training in the United States. In 2003, Gogava was named Qtraining in the United States. In 2003, Gogava was named Chief of the Counterterrorism Division of the Special Operations Center. From 2004-2006 he was Commander of Special Forces Brigade of the Ministry of Defense, and in 2006 he was named Deputy and later Chief of the Joint Staff of the Armed Forces of Georgia. He is married with three children, speaks native Georgian, fluent Russian, and is currently learning English.

LOGSDON